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the spring fling issue



On the Cover: Yorkshire Terrier puppy
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Springing Forward

Spring is just around the corner once again and here at *Family Dog*, we can't wait. So, we won't.

This is our spring issue, and we're turning the corner into brighter, longer days. We've got canines of all kinds—our annual AKC Meet the Breeds event features dogs by the dozen. Junior writer Theo Bernstein was back on the show floor to get the scoop (page 34). (I also ventured onto the MTB floor for the first time, and I've shared some of those thoughts, too.)

This month we say goodbye to Karen Pryor, a legend in the realm of not just dog training, but animal (and human) behavior as well (page 15).

Karen was committed to bringing out the best in dogs, but just as often, dogs bring the best out of us. ACE winner Kissable Katie the Poodle is a truly remarkable canine (page 25).

We hope you're getting outside with your pups as the weather improves. Hopefully our tips in this issue ensure you're not deterred by seasonal allergies (page 21) or that often unavoidable nuisance—mud (page 18).

You may notice the new name on the bottom of this Editor's Note. Yes, this is my first issue as Managing Editor, and I'm excited to keep bringing our readers fascinating and inspiring articles on everything canine.

I'm also interested in what *you* want to see in the pages of *Family Dog*. What are your favorite types of stories in these pages? Is there something else you're curious about? Let us know at family-dog@akc.org.



Phil Dzikiy
Managing Editor

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Gina DiNardo,
AKC Executive Secretary



managing editor
PHIL DZIKIY
phil.dzikiy@akc.org

consulting managing editor
MARA BOVSUN

senior consulting editor
LINDSEY DOBRUCK

copy editor
BUD BOCCONE

creative director
KATE MCCROARY

publications coordinator
ALYSSA LELI

design projects manager
CHRIS ESPIRITU

publications business manager
VENUS RODRIGUEZ
venus.rodriguez@akc.org
212-696-8260



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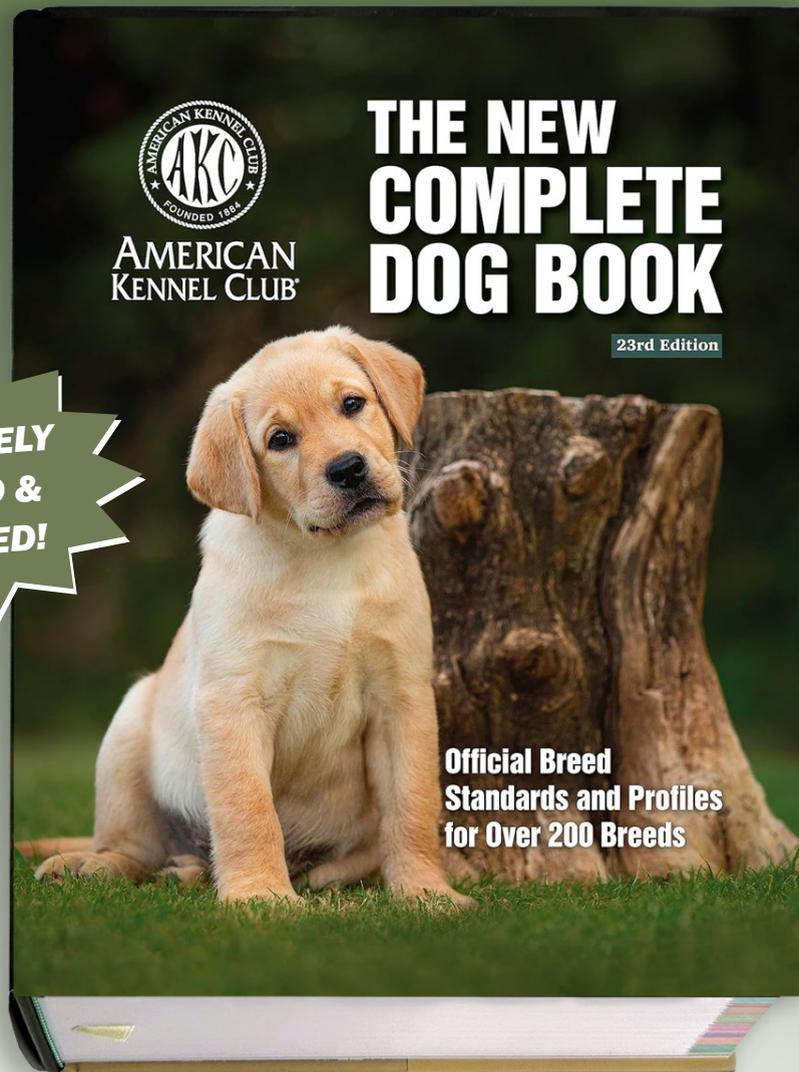
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Raleigh, NC 27617
AKC Customer Service:
919-233-9767
www.akc.org
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The American Kennel Club is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Founded in 1884, the AKC and its affiliated organizations advocate for the purebred dog as a family companion, advance canine health and well-being, work to protect the rights of all dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership.

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Whether sharing a cake, playing, racing, lounging, or posing as a group, our readers' dogs demonstrate what it's like to have and to be a BFF.

Faces of Friendship



1. OCEAN AND LEO,
Long Island, NY

2. BISCUIT AND BLU,
Seattle, WA

3. BELLA AND CONNOR,
Mount Sterling, KY

4. INDY, CHASE, AND COOPER,
Valley Center, CA

5. ELLA AND MILLIE,
Kingston, TN

6. HOWIE AND JOEY,
Highland, NY

7. KATIE AND JACK,
Midlothian, VA

8. LILLY ROSE AND JOEY
CASANOVA,

Evergreen, CO

9. ROSIE AND LOUIE,
Franklin, VA

10. MAGGIE MAE, EMMA, RUBY,
BIRCH, ELLIE, AND HONEY,
Fort Worth, TX

11. MATEO, NATALIE, AND ETTA,
Bloomington, IN

12. MATTIE, MEEKA, HANS,
AND AJAX,
Reno, NV

YOUR FAMILY DOG





Send Us Your Snaps!

We'd love to see *your* family dog. Email your digital photos (high-resolution, please) to familydog@akc.org. Please include "Your Family Dog Photo" in the subject line, as well as your dog's name and city and state of residence.

Only previously unpublished photos will be selected for publication. All photos become the property of the American Kennel Club. The AKC reserves the right to use the photos for any other purpose without compensation.



To Their Health

The AKC Canine Health Foundation has a new award for scientific breakthroughs.

The AKC Canine Health Foundation announced a new award in January aimed at acknowledging and rewarding the top breakthroughs in the studies of canine health.

Dubbed the Canine Health Discovery Award, the goal is to “celebrate the most groundbreaking research making a significant impact on the health and well-being of dogs.” A prize of \$10,000 will be awarded to the winner, along with honors at the foundation’s annual

gala, Canines and Cocktails.

“We are incredibly excited to announce the first Canine Health Discovery Award, which will offer a chance to celebrate the most groundbreaking canine health research annually,” CHF Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephanie Montgomery says in a release. “I look forward to seeing the nominations and learning about the transformative impact these breakthroughs will have for our dogs.”

The winner will also be eligible for



up to \$75,000 in research funding from CHF, upon approval of a research proposal. Two other finalists will also receive a \$2,500 award.

[Nominations are still open for the award](#); submissions are due by April 30.



facts & stats

5,600

Monty the Giant Schnauzer reigned supreme at the 2024 AKC National Championship, presented by Royal Canin, in December—besting more than 5,600 fellow canine competitors in the process.

The winner of the Working Group, 5-year-old Monty is the 24th AKC National Championship Best in Show winner. He's the second Giant Schnauzer winner in the history of the competition—Giant Schnauzer Bayou earned the honors in 2021.

Male Giant Schnauzers like Monty are 25.5 to 27.5 inches tall at the shoulder and weigh 75 to 95 pounds. Female Giant Schnauzers are a bit smaller at 23.5 to 25.5 inches tall, weighing 55 to 80 pounds.

Lunar New Year Celebration

As per the Chinese Zodiac, 2025 is the Year of the Snake. But it's always the Year of the Dog at the AKC Museum of the Dog, which celebrated Lunar New Year in late January.

Manager of Learning and Engagement at the AKC Museum of the Dog Sarah Moshenberg says, "We are thrilled to see this annual celebration grow each year! It's a wonderful opportunity to educate our visitors about breeds that originated in China through artworks in our collection."

The AKC Museum of the Dog (101 Park Ave., New York, NY) always has a monthly mix of special events, and many are dog friendly. Be sure to check the [museum's calendar](#) for upcoming events and activities.



Giant Schnauzer: John Ricard ©AKC; bottom: AKC Museum of the Dog

PAWPRINTS

AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence Nominations Open

This year brings expanded categories and canine teams into the fold.

The AKC Humane Fund's Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE) are back again. And this year, there are even more opportunities to nominate your outstanding dog.

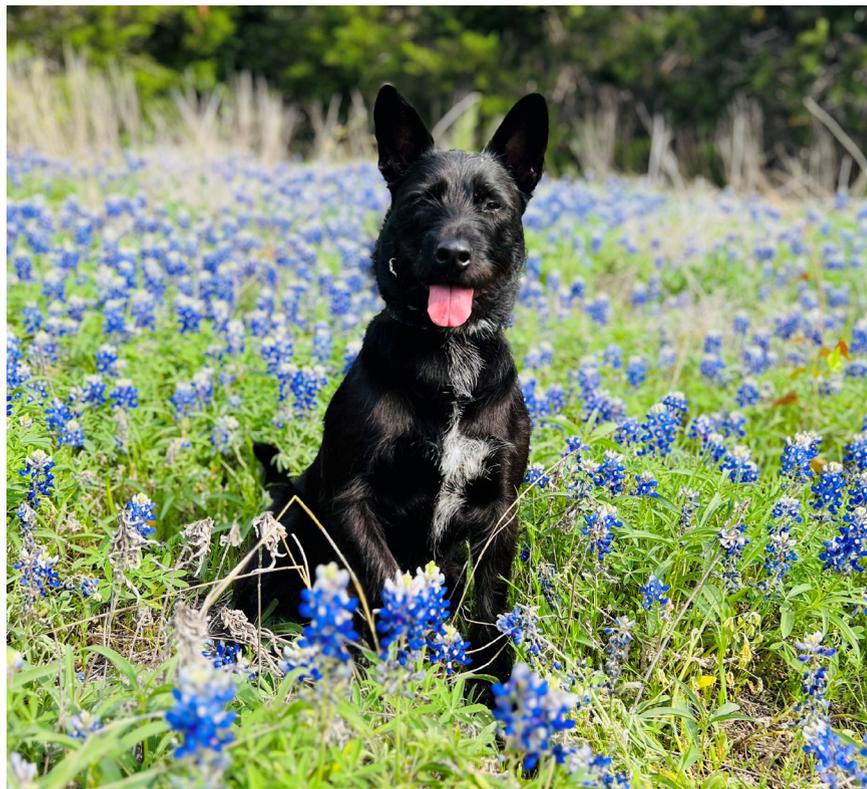
While the usual categories have returned, the awards have also added team consideration into the mix, in addition to expanding the Search and Rescue category into two subcategories. The categories now are as follows:

- Uniformed Service K-9
- Exemplary Companion
- Search and Rescue
 - Response (natural disasters, building collapses, etc.)
 - Human Detection (missing persons, remains, gravesite detection)
- Therapy Dog
- Service Dog
- Teams
 - Search and Rescue
 - Therapy
 - K-9 Police Work

If you'd like a better idea of just how special and outstanding the ACE-winning dogs are, just turn to page 25 to read about the most recent Service Dog winner, a Poodle named Kissable Katie.

Nominations are open until July 1. For more details, check out the [AKC's ACE page](#).

2024 ACE Winners



Exemplary Companion Dog: Winston
All-American Dog
Owner: Jeff Wells

Search & Rescue Dog: Besa
German Shepherd Dog
Owner: Sarah Gentry



Therapy Dog: Wallace
Old English Sheepdog
 Owner: Joy Allison LaField



Service Dog: Kissable Katie
Standard Poodle
 Owner: Jill Dempsey



Uniformed Services K-9: Rosco
Labrador Retriever
 Handler: Lt. John Haning

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Back on the Leash

Better behavior on dog walks (even after a long break)

Out of all the outdoor activities that dogs can participate in, going for a walk is probably the most universal. It's something that dogs and owners look forward to, as it's an opportunity to get out of the house, exercise, and enjoy each other's company.

However, it's not always easy (or a good

idea!) to take a walk, especially when weather conditions are not ideal. When I lived in Florida, if the days were excessively hot, I could always sneak in a 4 a.m. or 11 p.m. walk with my dogs to escape the heat. But here in the Northeast, when it's winter, the cold can be unavoidable, and your dog walks turn into a "get out, go potty, and rush

back in the house" kind of event.

But fortunately, spring returns, the weather warms up, and you can embark on the first long walk in weeks—maybe months! Only it's not as enjoyable as you remember it to be. As a matter of fact, it's downright unpleasant.

The pulling, the barking, the chaos, and the accompanying embarrassment. You

return home, determined to regain the control and joy of your walks together, but you're unsure where to start. Here are some "Rebuilding the Walk" strategies that I teach my students.

THE WALK BEGINS BEFORE YOU WALK OUT THE DOOR

If your dog is leaping, barking, and spinning when he sees you pick up a leash, *that* sets the tone for the walk. It's better to rehearse throughout the day—picking up the leash, putting it down, and rewarding your dog, *if* he stays calm.

Done with regularity, your dog will be much calmer when he sees the leash. Then you can start step two, which is clipping the leash on and then immediately taking it off. If you're (unintentionally) cranking your dog up by excitedly asking him "Who wants to go for a walk?" you need to stop doing that. Immediately.

CHANGE YOUR ROUTE

Working on your dog's heeling skills in a quiet, distraction-free area is key to making progress. Eventually you'll increase the distraction level of the environments you're in, but if you do it too soon, you'll be back to square one before you know it. This tip requires you to either change your route, or location, or the timing of your walk to avoid potential triggers that your in-training dog can't handle.

KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP

Whether it's for a one-time consult, a group class, or private training, a dog pro can give you tips that can make your training sessions much more effective. Knowing yourself is key to choosing the program. If you're a DIYer, maybe you need just one or two consults to get you on the right path. If you need some hand holding or motivation, classes can be great to keep you accountable for your dog's progress. Of course, the right trainer is the key to your success, so make sure you do your



homework and find someone who's qualified!

THE CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

And the dog! The right collar and leash will make your training more effective, and the wrong ones will set you back. This is another testament to the value of trainers, as they can tell you things that you may not know, like why small dogs should have leashes with small bolts, and large dogs should have leashes that have a good amount of width.



DOGS WITH CHALLENGES

For dogs with reactivity issues:

■ **Distance is your friend.** Start practicing at a distance where your dog notices the other dog or person but doesn't react (this is their "threshold"). Gradually decrease the distance over time as they become more comfortable.

■ **Redirect their focus.** As soon as *you* spot a potential trigger, use a cue like "look at me" or "watch" to get their attention back on you. Of course, this should be a well-practiced behavior that your dog understands and follows. Additionally, you can choose to ask him to do another behavior, like *sit*, *spin*, *hand touch*, or anything that's reliable. Reward him for focusing on you instead of the trigger.

■ **Stay calm and consistent.** Reacting to your dog's behavior with frustration or anger can make them more anxious. Instead, calmly move them away from the trigger if they become reactive.

Fearful dogs need extra patience and encouragement.

■ **Go slow.** If your dog is fearful,

TRAINING & BEHAVIOR

don't push it into situations that are overwhelming. Start in low-stress environments, and gradually introduce new experiences.

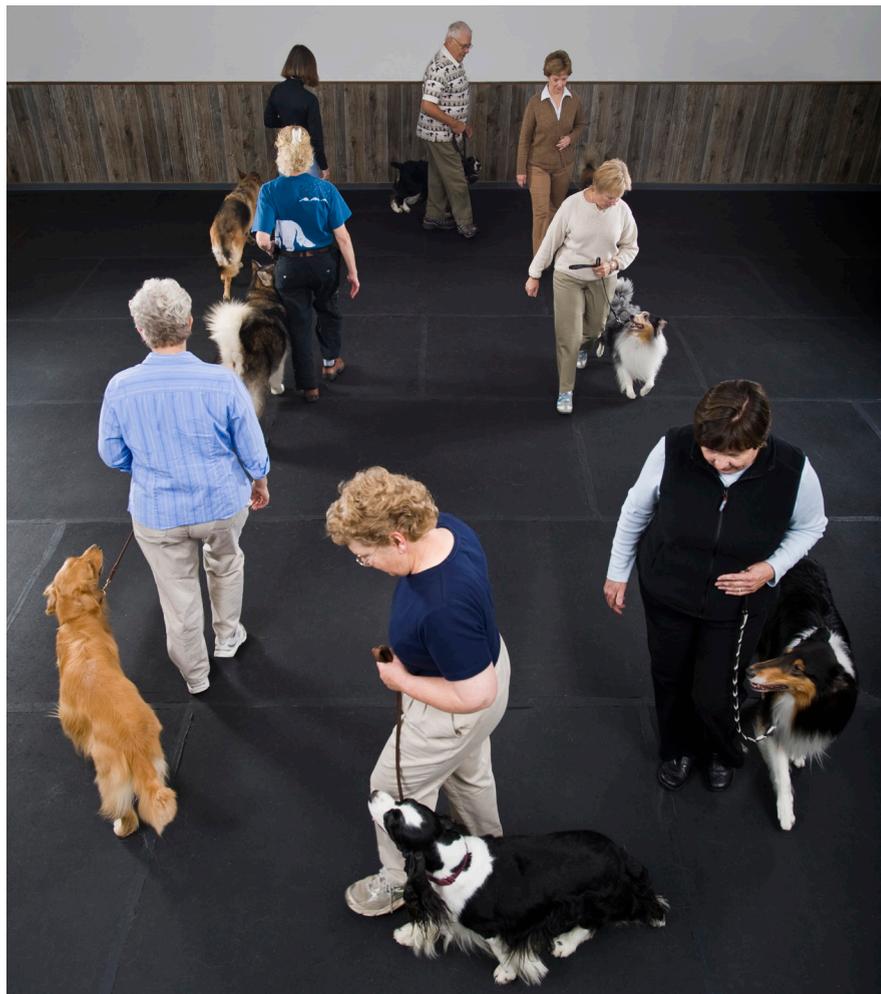
■ **Build trust.** Reward small steps toward bravery, like walking closer to a new object or calmly passing a stranger.

■ **Consider a professional.** If fearfulness persists, consult a trainer who can help identify triggers and create a plan tailored to your dog's needs.

Now that you have training ideas and a plan to get started, I'll leave you with some wisdom I share with students when they ask, "How long until my dog is done training?"

Training your dog and going to the gym share some similarities. The biggest one is that if you stop going to the gym, your body eventually returns to its pre-workout state.

The same is true of dog training. If you stop training, your dog's behavior will eventually revert to where it started. Once you're past the initial training stages, plan on keeping your dog's training sharp with continued practice, which should be fun *and* one of the best



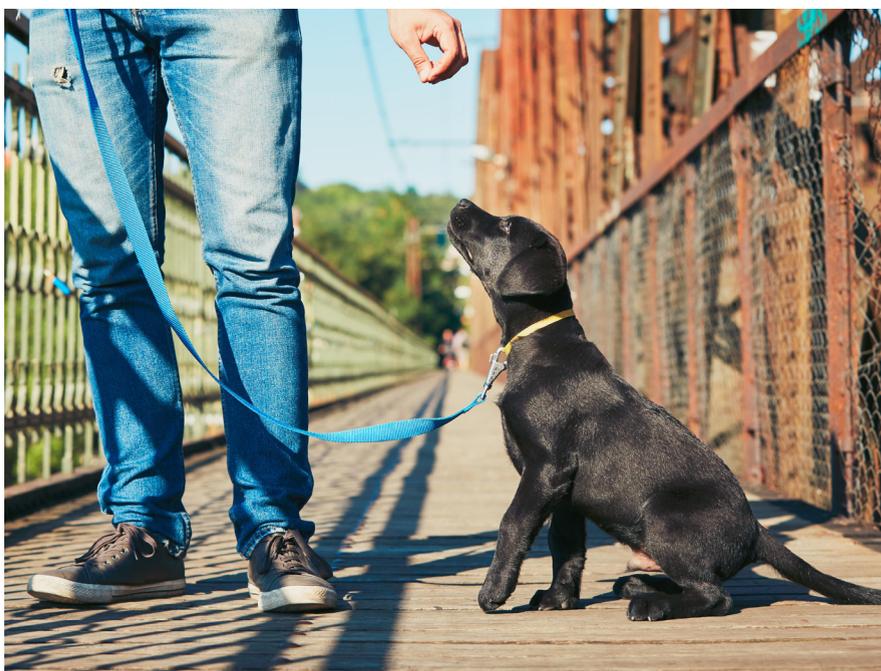
parts of your day together! If it's not, rethink your training program, your

methods, or even your trainer.

Additionally, you might look for an AKC sport that you and your dog can have fun competing in. Because if you decide you'd like to earn a title in, for example, rally obedience, then practicing for that can be exciting because you're working for a specific goal (a title and ribbons)!

Calm, loose-leash walking after a long break takes time and practice, but it's absolutely doable with the right approach. By starting with the basics, troubleshooting common issues, and practicing consistently, you'll have your dog walking like a pro—and maybe even ready for the rally ring—in no time! **FD**

Kathy Santo has trained dogs and their families for over 35 years and competed in AKC obedience and agility. She has a training school in Waldwick, New Jersey, and online courses. For more information, visit kathysantodogtraining.com.



Karen Pryor: 1932–2025

Tribute to a dog training legend

When Karen Pryor's death was announced, hundreds of dog trainers flocked to social media to tell their stories. They talked about the time they met Karen at a conference, or about a conversation they had with her about dog training. They discussed how they watched her use a clicker to train an animal she had never seen before in a matter of minutes.

Perhaps best of all, they wrote about her kindness, positivity, and tendency to support and elevate all dog trainers.

KNOWLEDGE AND WRITING

Known for her extraordinary way with words, Karen was the daughter of writer and screenwriter Philip Wylie. Writing was in her blood.

In 1954, Karen married Tap Pryor. He was a marine biologist who founded Sea Life Park in Oahu, Hawaii, and



Karen Pryor in 2011, with Lily, owned by Steve Golson

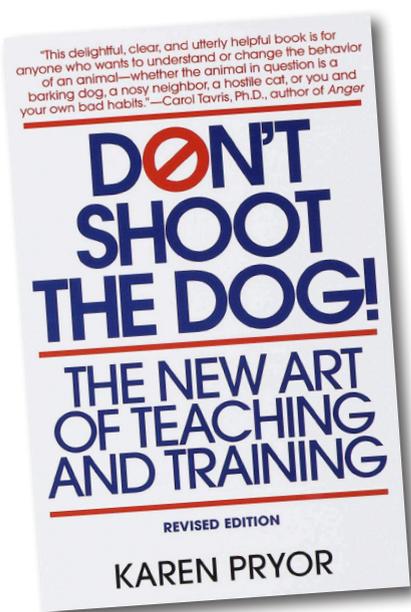
it was there that Karen began to work with marine mammals. She had an idea about training dolphins—but she was not yet a behaviorist and she wasn't sure about where to start.

Typical of Karen, where she started was at the top. She contacted B.F. Skinner, a leading authority on operant conditioning. Skinner interacted with Karen and sent her training materials.



Left: A publicity photo taken during Karen Pryor's time at the Oceanic Institute; Right: Karen training a dolphin at Sea Life Park

Before long, Karen was on her way. There were soon trained porpoises at Sea



Life Park. (In 1984, Karen was appointed to the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission by President Ronald Reagan.)

In her lifetime, Karen used what she learned about behavior to write many books and articles on a variety of topics. Her 1963 book *Nursing Your Baby* changed the lives of millions of women with newborns and is still an international bestseller after numerous updated editions.

One of Karen's most popular books, *Don't Shoot the Dog*, was written in 1984. While still a classic read for dog trainers and those interested in human and animal behavior, *Don't Shoot the Dog* isn't limited to canine concerns. It is an easy-to-read book that explains how to use simple procedures to change behavior.

Don't Shoot the Dog addresses everything from what to do with a grumpy gorilla to how to handle a spouse who always comes home from work in a bad

mood. The book provides tips for dealing with a roommate who leaves dirty laundry all over the place, how to fix a faulty tennis swing, and more. *Don't Shoot the Dog* is a true classic, worth reading and re-reading.

CONNECTING WITH BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

In the 1980s, nationally recognized behavior analyst and psychology professor Dr. Jon Bailey was fascinated with Carl Sagan. Sagan was an astronomer, planetary scientist, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, and author, but most of all, he was a science communicator who kept a television audience spellbound as he talked about the planets.

"We need a Carl Sagan for behavior analysis," Bailey said, "someone who can take the science and explain it so that everyone understands it."

Within a few months of him saying



Karen Pryor in action

that, an article appeared in Reader's Digest. The article was an excerpt from the book *Don't Shoot the Dog*, and it was by Karen Pryor. As Bailey once said at an event: "We have our Carl Sagan and her name is Karen Pryor!"

He found Karen and invited her to speak at the Florida Association for Behavior Analysis (FABA) conference. After her presentation, the word got out, and she was invited to speak at the Association for Behavior Analysis (now the Association for Behavior Analysis International, or ABAI) in 1992.

IMPACT ON DOG TRAINING

After the introduction to behavior analysis, Karen started to make an impact on the world of dog training. She gave seminars and workshops and demonstrated how conditioned reinforcement works by using a clicker. She started Sunshine Books in 1992, and later founded Karen Pryor Clicker



Karen Pryor in 2017

Training, Karen Pryor Academy, and the Clicker Expo. Along with the Clicker

Expo, Karen Pryor Academy continues to offer certification and education for dog trainers.

Karen's long-lasting impact will still be seen in the hundreds of thousands of people she influenced through her work. Along with a few others, she was one of the main figures responsible for the shift to positive reinforcement and systematic behavioral procedures in dog training. **FD**

[Here is Karen's historic talk at the Association for Behavior Analysis conference in 1992.](#)

Author's Note: It is common when writing about a person to refer to them by their last name. In this case, I call her Karen because she was a friend—both a friend to me, and a friend to all of us.

Mary R. Burch, Ph.D., is a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist through the Animal Behavior Society. She is the director of the AKC Family Dog program.



In the Mud

Tips for grooming your muddy dog

As dog owners know, spring is mud season. Before your dog gets gloopy, consider these ideas and products that will make grooming your muddy dog a bit less of an SOS situation.

BEFORE MUD

Before your dog goes out, try using the horse-grooming topical product called [ShowSheen](#). In addition to keeping mud from sticking quite so much, this product may prevent burrs and dangerous grass awns like foxtails from burrowing into your dog's coat or skin.

Kim Sykes, CPDT-KA, an AKC Breeder of Merit and owner of K9 Manners & More in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, says, "It's the best product for keeping coats from sticking. When they dry, the mud just falls off! I use this if my dogs are going herding, and it really helps. You can even get them wet, and most of the product stays on until you add soap."

Just one caution: ShowSheen makes floors and other surfaces slick, so Sykes says, "Be careful where you spray it. We've had some issues with overspray around our grooming table, and I have to use a mixture of dishwashing liquid

and vinegar to get it to come up easily."

Some owners also recommend Cowboy Magic, another line of horse and dog products. Along with shine and conditioning options, their [Curry on a Stik](#) brush features cone-shaped fingers that help pull mud—and whatever else your dog may pick up outside—off your dog's coat. It's similar to the [Kong Zoom Groom](#), but it has a handle that may keep your hands a little cleaner.

AFTER MUD

Let it dry first. It's much harder to deal with wet mud than dry mud. Claudia

All photos: Alamy Stock, Golden and Labrador Retriever: Arterra Picture Library



Loomis, president and owner of several CB Pet Market stores and grooming salons in New Jersey, says, “Mud is fun for dogs! There are lots of products that can help, but for me and my Samoyeds, I usually just let it dry then brush it right out. If you have a heavily coated dog, you

do not want to deal with wet mud unless you want to stick the pup in the tub and give them a full bath, then dry them out.”

Still. Wet mud? Not fun or funny. Be patient and corral your dog in the mud room, if you have one, or crate them until the mud dries.

Prevent staining. If you’re worried about mud staining dogs with light-colored coats, Loomis recommends using a waterless bath product or conditioning spray after brushing out dried mud. She says, “Any coat conditioning spray, especially one with a little natural silicone, will lubricate the coat so mud has less of a chance of sticking or staining.”

Try a bathless bath. Sykes uses a waterless/no-rinse shampoo from [Pro-Line](#) on her Border Collies. She explains, “This is a spray that you rub into the coat and then rub off with a towel. I have gone from muddy herding fields to the conformation ring in just a few minutes with this product.”

Focus on paws. For smaller dogs or those with only a couple of dogs, look for paw plunger cups available from a variety of brands such as [Dexas MudBuster](#). Just put some warm, soapy water inside and plunge each paw for a bit and dry it off when it comes out.

But if you’ve got a whole pack, that could be tedious. Tonya Christiansen, who owns Must Love Dogs Boutique & Spa in Grand Haven, Michigan, says, “When you have multiple dogs, that’s like a 20- to 30-minute task, and who’s got time for that?”



Top left: Lella Cutler; Top right: Rosemary Roberts; Paws: Philip Smith

Other Outdoor Hazards

Warmer and potentially wetter weather also ramps up outdoor risks beyond mud puddles. Check your dog after every outing for these hazards and remove them ASAP:

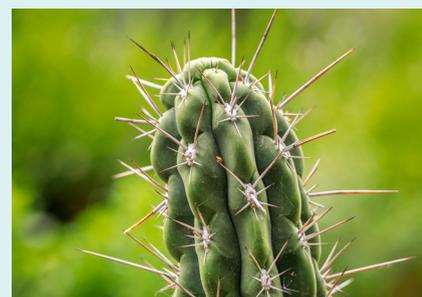
Grass awns: Grass seeds, including foxtails, with one-way barbs can work their way into dogs' skin, eyes, noses, and ears and cause real trouble.



Burrs: Small, spiked seeds from several types of wild plants and weeds often firmly attach to dogs' coats and your clothes.



Cactus needles: Sharper than you may think, these can put dogs' feet, skin, and maybe even eyes at risk.



If you haven't already applied a product to your dog's coat before heading outside, try using a little dry cornstarch as you carefully remove the awns and burrs by hand or with a metal comb.

Use a loop in your leash to remove cactus needles, rather than your hand, by wrapping the leash so that you can pull or flick the needles off your dog without getting poked yourself.

It's probably faster, Christiansen says, to use a microfiber towel just inside the door to get off as much mud as possible before letting your dog run around inside. "It's not 100 percent," she says, "but it's better than nothing."

Try these dog towels. Sykes is

particularly fond of [Enzo dog towels](#), which she calls the "best towel ever." Apparently, these microfiber towels hold a lot of moisture without that "sticky icky" feel of other microfiber towels. She adds, "I love them for dock diving. They will hold a gallon of water. Just wring it

out and keep drying! I used it with my 45-pound Border Collie at (the) North America Diving Dogs nationals, and it was awesome."

MUD: THE UPSIDES

Though it can be annoying, mud does offer some benefits to dogs:

- Stronger immunity and gut biome from exposure to beneficial microbiota
- Richer sensory and play experience—both how it smells and feels
- Autonomy during outdoor play, without our rules or objections

So, try not to freak out too much. In many cases, a muddy dog is a happy dog. **FD**

Roxanne Hawn is a journalist and an award-winning dog blogger. She is the author of Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate.





Getting the Itch

Treating seasonal allergies in dogs

Did you know that dogs can suffer from seasonal allergies? But instead of the hay fever symptoms like sneezing and itchy, watery eyes that people experience, seasonal allergies in dogs involve the skin and ears. The condition is known as atopic dermatitis, or atopy, and was reported among the top 10 most common medical conditions submitted to Nationwide Pet Insurance in 2021 (according to the [2023 AAHA Management of Allergic Skin Diseases in Dogs and Cats Guidelines.](#))

Angela Hampton Picture Library / Alamy Stock Photo



WHAT IS ATOPY?

Canine seasonal allergies occur when the immune system overreacts to common allergens such as pollen, dust mites, or mold. Affected dogs experience an intense itching sensation, especially on the face, ears, and limbs. Scratching the itch causes trauma to the skin, allowing bacteria and yeast

to penetrate deeper than normal. This causes skin and ear infections, which contribute to even more itching, pain, and inflammation—making affected dogs quite miserable.

There is no definitive test to diagnose atopy in dogs. Instead, veterinarians and owners must work together to rule out other causes of skin and ear disease, review how clinical signs change with the seasons, and properly control external parasites like fleas and ticks. It's known as a "diagnosis of exclusion" and may require repeated testing and treatment trials to diagnose.

TREATING CANINE ATOPY

Canine atopy usually requires lifelong management to control itching and treat secondary infections, meaning years of dedication and communication between owners and the veterinary team. Various treatments, both applied to the skin and taken internally, are recommended to bolster the skin barrier and calm the overactive immune system. Treatment must be monitored and adjusted as needed—what works for one dog may not work for another, and what works one year may not work the next, due to aging, changing allergen levels, and other health concerns.

Medicated baths, topical treatments, and nutritional supplements play an important role in managing canine atopy. Let's take a deeper look at systemic treatments available for this condition.

TRADITIONAL TREATMENTS

Glucocorticoids include steroids like prednisone and prednisolone. Both oral and topical formulations are available and are very helpful to manage acute allergy flare-ups. These drugs work by suppressing many different parts of the immune response. However, because their actions are far-reaching, they have the potential to cause a wide array of adverse effects.



Cyclosporine is another drug used to treat canine atopy. Sold under the brand name Atopica, it blunts the immune response and requires once-daily oral dosing.

Allergen-specific immunotherapy is the only definitive treatment for canine atopy. Testing is required to identify the specific allergens that trigger an individual dog's disease. Those allergens are then injected at a dose that will downgrade the otherwise exaggerated immune response. This treatment may take up to a year to be effective, so additional treatments

and supplements are needed to control clinical signs and secondary infections during that time.

UNLEASHING NEW TREATMENT STRATEGIES

Thankfully, new drugs have been developed over the past decade to provide additional and more targeted relief for atopic dogs.

Oclacitinib (Apoquel) is given orally once or twice daily and blocks a variety of immune system signaling molecules

that cause itch and inflammation. It is known as a JAK inhibitor, a term you may have heard used in human medicine, which describes the family of enzymes that it affects. Oclacitinib is reported to reduce itching within four hours of administration and to be as effective as steroids at controlling skin inflammation.

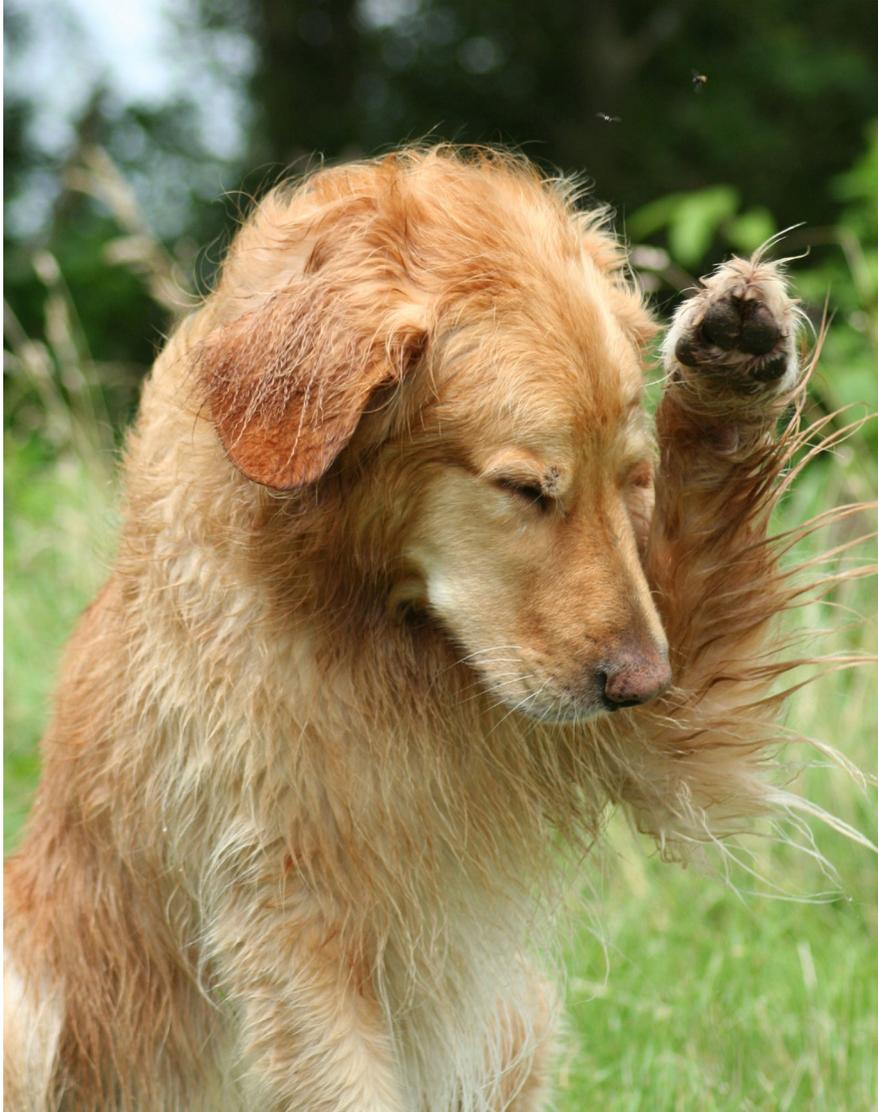
Lokivetmab (Cytoint) is another relatively new treatment helping dogs with atopy. This injectable treatment provides itch relief within 24 hours of administration and is given every four to eight weeks, providing a much simpler option for busy dog owners. Lokivetmab is a monoclonal antibody—a specific antibody made in the laboratory that binds to the immune system signaling molecule known as IL-31. By binding with IL-31, lokivetmab prevents this molecule from causing itchiness.

ITCHING FOR MORE

Even with these new treatment options, scientists are looking for new and more effective treatment strategies



Pembroke Welsh Corgi, Alexander Korzh / Alamy Stock Photo; Medicine, Oleksandr Lysenko / Alamy Stock Photo



Golden Retriever: Tierfotoagentur / Alamy-Stock Photo

for canine seasonal allergies. The AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF), a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health of all dogs, is funding several promising research studies that could provide additional treatments for affected dogs.

■ At Long Island University, researchers are studying the leading bacterial cause of canine skin infections, *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius*, and the toxins it produces. In people, a similar bacterium aggravates skin infections by killing red and white blood cells. If the same is true in dogs, drugs that block these actions

may provide a new treatment strategy for this common secondary infection.

■ Another strategy to control secondary skin infections is being evaluated by CHF-funded researchers at the University of Florida. Again, borrowing knowledge from human medicine, they are investigating if a dilute bleach solution applied topically could be as effective as a commonly used veterinary antimicrobial at restoring the normal community of microbes on a dog's skin. If so, this treatment could reduce the need for oral antibiotics and the development of antibiotic resistance.

■ Finally, at the University of Zurich, CHF-funded researchers are studying a unique way to restore the normal microbes and function of a dog's skin barrier. Fecal microbiota transplantation involves transferring stool from a healthy donor dog to the gastrointestinal tract of a sick dog via an enema or oral capsule. While it may sound off-putting, we know that the microbes living in the gastrointestinal tract have a significant influence on the immune system. This study is testing the theory that treatments aimed at the gut microbiome can impact the development and treatment of atopy.

Seasonal allergies in dogs are influenced by many factors. They require a lifelong dedication to monitoring clinical signs, evaluating treatment responses, and frequent adjustments to therapy. Thankfully, CHF is funding research by leading veterinary scientists to add more options to the atopy treatment tool kit available for affected dogs. By tackling atopy and secondary infections from multiple angles, there is a greater chance that dogs can spend less time itching and more time enjoying life with their families. **FD**

Sharon M. Albright, DVM, CCRT is the Veterinary Communications & Outreach Manager for the AKC Canine Health Foundation. She graduated from the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine and practiced small animal primary care medicine in the mid-Atlantic region for fifteen years. She is a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist and an Elite Fear Free certified professional.

To learn more about research on canine atopy and other health concerns, visit akcCHF.org.

Teddy's Daughter



At the 1941 Santa Barbara Kennel Club show, Cocker Spaniel Ch. Stockdale Town Talk, owner-handled by C.B. Van Meter, took Best in Show. The rare win shot seen here came to the AKC 81 years ago with a handwritten note from Van Meter, boasting that his Cocker was undefeated in the breed ring in 99 times shown.

The AKC archive houses thousands of similar show shots. What makes this one unique is the identity of the trophy presenter: Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the eldest child of Theodore Roosevelt. The 26th president was a confirmed dog lover and passed along that passion to his children.

A teenager during TR's presidency, Alice became notorious for her outrageous antics. "I can run the country, or I can run Alice," her exasperated father said, "but I can't do both."

Later, as the wife of Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth, Alice was the doyenne of Washington society, famous for her stinging wit. (A sofa cushion in her salon was embroidered with the words, "If you can't say something good about someone, come sit right here by me.") She died in 1980, age 96, during the administration of Jimmy Carter, the 14th occupant of the White House during her long residence in Washington. **FD**



1902: Teenaged Alice with her Chihuahua, Leo

Joan Ludwig win photo/ACC GAZETTE Collection; Alice 1902/Public Domain



How a Poodle Named *Kissable* *Katie* Changed a Life

Meet the service dog who won a 2024 AKC Humane Fund Award for Canine Excellence by transforming her handler's life.

By Jen Reeder

When Jill Dempsey found her life at a major fork in the road, a Standard Poodle named Kissable Katie led her down a path of possibility.

Dempsey became legally blind when she was 21, after a brain surgery went wrong. She suffered a hemorrhagic stroke and wound up in a coma.

“When I woke up, I was blind, had dif-

ficulty speaking, and couldn't walk or feed myself,” she recalls. “I couldn't live alone.”

Her family cared for her for decades, but within the span of two years, her mother, father, and older brother died. So in 2014, Dempsey faced a choice: enter an assisted living facility, or learn to live independently.

She fervently wanted to stay in her house in Palm Coast, Florida.



friendly, and she said she only walked certain parts of the street because she couldn't read the street signs," McAnnany says. "I said, 'Well, then come walk around the block with me and my dog.' So we did, and from there she just took off. I think Katie and Jill are totally amazing."

The duo's next major outing was to a doctor's appointment. Dempsey enrolled in a transportation service for people with disabilities and "gave Katie permission to take control."

When they were dropped off, she asked her dog to "find inside." Once inside, they found the front desk to ask where the office was. Then she said, "Katie, find the elevator," and they got in the elevator. "Katie, help me find two," and the dog helped her locate the button with braille for the second floor. "Katie, find left," and they turned left to enter the office. Later, they repeated the experience in reverse to get home.

"Katie was my inspiration," she says. "She just has this calm about her: 'We've got this. I'm not going to abandon you.'"

"She gave me the impression, 'Yes, we can.'"

One Amazing Dog

Their bond continued to strengthen thanks to Katie's prowess not just as a guide dog, but through medical alert. The Poodle alerts Dempsey to impending seizures and is trained to find help if she has a seizure in public. At home, she is trained to use a medical alert box—and she has done so.

"Katie has had to call rescue to help me when I've been unconscious after a seizure," she says. "She has tapped the medical alert button, barked to tell them there was an emergency, unlocked my door, and brought rescue to me."

She's opened metaphorical doors, too. Now Dempsey enjoys birdwatching with Kissable Katie and her friend Michelle Bridges at Audubon Society events. Not only can she identify birds by their songs,

So she reached out to Freedom Guide Dogs, a nonprofit with a program called "Hometown Training." For six weeks, trainers brought potential guide dogs to Dempsey's home to try to find the perfect match.

One dog proved too young and rambunctious. Another walked too slowly for Dempsey. Then she started a trial run with Kissable Katie and a trainer by heading to a doctor's office. While they were in the waiting room, something extraordinary happened.

"Katie barked one time and went up to the nurse's station. Three minutes later, I had an epileptic seizure," she says. "The doctor said, 'That dog alerted that you were going to have a seizure. That is the dog you need to have.'"

Learning on the Fly

Dempsey agreed. Still, partnering with a service dog without a trainer nearby felt scary. She'd never even owned a pet dog.

"How do you trust that dog at your side? Is that dog going to chase a squirrel and run away and leave you standing there?" Dempsey says. "Katie wasn't like that. Katie was firm and solid and comforting. She gave me hope."

That hope helped Dempsey leave the "safe haven" of home—which she'd rarely left for years. She practiced walking with Katie out the front door and turning right or left to walk past a house or two.

One day, a new neighbor, Sharon McAnnany, introduced herself to the pair while she was walking her dog, Sam.

"We started talking because Jill's very



Left: “Katie is my guardian angel,” says Jill Dempsey. “I’m not doing things the way I thought or expected I would, but Katie has helped put me on the path that God wants me to take.” Right: Dempsey in costume for a reenactment, with Katie (right) and Sir Enoch.

but she can hear rustling and let Bridges know where to point her binoculars.



Katie once helped save the life of a man in the audience at a CFDA state match in Virginia, according to Jill Dempsey. “Katie was on stage with me. I was registering people for a match. She jumped off stage and ran to a man who was having cardiac arrhythmias and who was about to have a heart attack, and she barked and got him medical help,” she says. “Katie has not only saved my life, but at least two other lives that we know of.”

“Jill can guess about the size of the bird from the type of movement, whether it was a flutter or a big flapping thing,” Bridges says. “I call us the blind leading the blond.”

During one bird walk, Bridges invited Dempsey to come to a Cowboy Fast Draw Association (CFDA) competition. Shooters stand at a line and at a visual cue, fire guns with wax bullets at targets to determine who has the fastest draw.

Dempsey arrived in dark glasses with Kissable Katie and a white cane and said she’d like to sign up.

“They literally didn’t know what to do with me. They joke now they thought I was a lawyer with the ADA trying to trip up the gun club,” Dempsey says with a laugh.

The executive director of the group, Cal “Quick Cal” Eilrich, values inclusivity and got on the phone. He knew of a blind shooter who would ask a helper to tap the target to help her align, and he shared that tip with her. Later, he designed an audible signal system for Dempsey, since everyone else fires when a light flashes.

Dempsey—who goes by the cowboy

alias “Blue Hawk” after her favorite bird—proved a natural, and Kissable Katie stayed steady even with guns firing, calmly guiding Blue Hawk to and from the starting line.

Blue Hawk went on to win the ladies’ division in the CFDA’s 2017 Florida State Championship, and Kissable Katie is now the only dog who is an honorary member of the CFDA.

“She’s Blue Hawk’s sidekick,” Eilrich says. “Our membership is in awe of Blue Hawk and they all love Kissable Katie. They’re part of our CFDA family.”

CFDA was a springboard to more fun for the pair, like Western reenactments. Dempsey and Katie dress in 1860s clothing for “good versus bad” scenarios.

“Katie had to wonder why I was doing the things I was doing: sitting on a train that was being robbed or pretending to be a bank teller in a bank that was getting robbed while people were shooting around us,” she says. “She trusted me that I would protect her and have her back and I trusted her that she wasn’t going to abandon me.”

Solo Service Dogs (Or: What should you do if a service dog approaches without their handler?)

If Jill Dempsey has an epileptic seizure in public, Kissable Katie is trained to go find help. She's concerned that many people don't know what to do if approached by a service dog without a handler.

"If you ever see a service dog in a vest and harness by itself, the dog is not trying to hurt you. The dog is not lost. The dog is trying to get help for its handler," she says. "Follow the dog."

Giving Back—and Receiving Recognition

Dempsey is so grateful to Kissable Katie and all the people who have supported her journey to having such a full, rewarding life that she gives back by volunteering over 1,000 hours of her time each year.

Three days a week, she volunteers as a citizen observer patrol dispatcher for the



"I love Katie's regal demeanor. Nothing fazes her. Nothing sends her into a tizzy. She is always cool, calm, collected, and composed. She is Princess Kate," Jill Dempsey says.

Flagler County Sheriff's Office, helping members of the community get services. She also raises money and awareness for service dog organizations, including Old Glory Service Dogs 4 Veterans and Pop Smoke K9 for Veterans.

Bridges, a Navy veteran, says she knows several veterans who've partnered with service dogs after meeting Dempsey and Kissable Katie. She's delighted that the American Kennel Club named Kissable Katie the winner of the Service Dog category in the 2024 AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence, which was televised on ESPN2 in December to honor canine heroes.

"Service dogs play such an important role in the lives of their owners. Kissable Katie is a prime example of how they can open up a world of possibilities for their owners," says Brandi Hunter Munden, AKC Vice President of Public Relations and Communications. "And she happens to be a really good girl! We are happy to honor her and all that she brings to her owner's life."

Dempsey is thrilled that her regal sidekick won a prestigious award, and that the AKC donated \$1,000 in honor of Kissable Katie to Freedom Guide Dogs. She rewarded Katie with her favorite treats: a hefty soup bone from the butcher shop, and sweet potatoes wrapped in duck jerky.

At age 15, Kissable Katie is enjoying retirement after training Dempsey's current guide dog, Sir Enoch. She helped



"Katie is so good with other people," says Jill Dempsey. "People are drawn to her automatically."

him learn guiding skills and how to pick his toys up off the floor to eliminate tripping hazards.

Dempsey, 58, hopes the way Kissable Katie transformed her life inspires others to consider partnering with a service dog, and for breeders to consider donating a puppy to a service dog organization.

"I went from not leaving the house to now I'm never home," she says. "Katie was the bridge. It's because of Katie that all of this became possible." **FD**

Freelance journalist Jen Reeder is the 2025 Hall of Fame inductee of the Dog Writers Association of America.

For more information, visit freedomguidedogs.com and read more about the [AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence](#).



TRUE TERRIERS

**Don't be fooled by their petite size and glossy coat—
Yorkshire Terriers love to work.**

By Penny Leigh



Yorkies are highly adaptable and may embrace competition, as owner Andrea Cobb has found.

Ask Andrea Cobb what it is like to own a Yorkshire Terrier, and she will quickly correct you.

“I’m owned by Yorkies,” the Alabama resident quips. “I fell in love with the breed more than 20 years ago when I first met one. I love their small size, terrier attitude, and confidence—and they are great traveling companions.”

Yorkshire Terriers originated in the mid-1800s in Yorkshire, England. Mill workers and miners developed the breed to keep factories and mines free of rodents. They were bred smaller and

smaller as the years went on and became a very popular companion breed.

But Yorkies still love to work, and in Cobb’s home, they do.

Roger barely tips the scales at 6 1/2 pounds, but he blazes through an agility course at the same pace as many bigger dogs. He was the top-ranked Yorkie in the AKC Agility League for fall 2024. His housemate, Rae, took the honor in the summer 2024 season.

Making the achievement even greater is the fact that Cobb and her dogs started competing in agility only two years ago. Roger and Rae are already in the top level

of Masters/Excellent in AKC agility.

“I got started at Huntsville (Alabama) Obedience Training Club. When I first joined the club, I watched a lot of agility, and it looked really fun,” she says. “So, I signed up for classes and we have been having a great time in the sport ever since.”

Cobb owns four Yorkies and has trained them for many sports over the years. In addition to agility, her dogs also compete in conformation, obedience, and rally. They have earned titles in Fast CAT, AKC Trick Dog, AKC Canine Good Citizen, and AKC FITDOG. They recently tackled scent work training.

THE STORY ON YORKIES

Origin: England, specifically the counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the mid-1800s

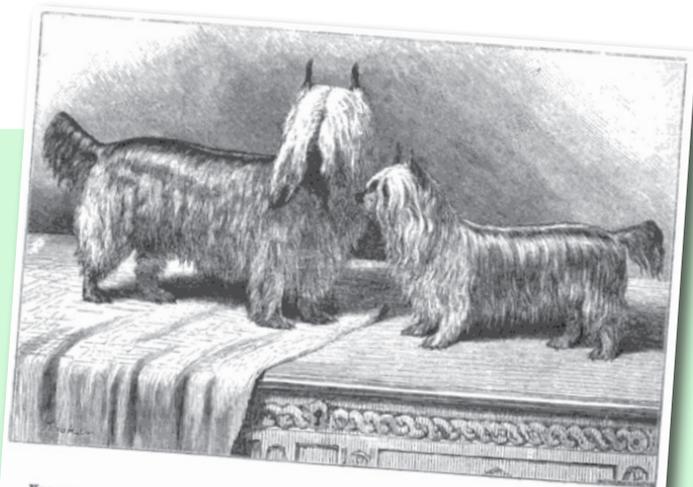
Size: 7 to 8 inches and up to 7 pounds

Average Life Expectancy: 11 to 15 years

Recognized by the AKC: 1885

Coat: Long, straight hair that is glossy, silky, and fine

Colors: Blue and gold, blue and tan, black and tan, and black and gold



YORKSHIRE TERRIERS.—MRS. FOSTER'S "HUDDERSFIELD BEN" AND LADY GIFFARD'S "KATIE."



Clockwise from top: Huddersfield Ben (left), considered the foundation sire of the breed; Early 1920's postcard of working-class man with a Yorkshire terrier dog inside his coat pocket; Smoky (Yorkie Doodle Dandy), who served with the US Army during World War II



From The Dogs of the British Islands, by John Henry Walsh / Courtesy Wikimedia commons; thislife pictures / Alamy Stock Photo; Courtesy Bill Wynne

“Yorkies are independent thinkers and can be tenacious. Many people say they are stubborn,” Cobb says. “I find Yorkies to be biddable and fun to train and compete with as long as the training is fun and positive. I’ve always said that I’ve never met a stubborn one

and I’ve trained several of them over the years ... keep in mind that they are highly intelligent so (they) don’t overdo repetitive skill work. Short sessions work best in training this breed.”

Roger and Rae run on the Agility League team She Shed’s Tag Team in the

largest division of Regulation Senior. The dogs tackle Masters-level courses in the Senior class. Joining the League was a great boost to their agility training, Cobb said.

“It has helped improve my handling skills, my dogs are running better, and



Yorkshire Terriers Rae and Roger have racked up the honors.

we have improved our teamwork,” she says. “The group of handlers are super supportive and fun.”

Roger especially loves the jumps in agility, and he works for homemade

beef and chicken treats. But his ultimate reward may surprise you. “His all-time super-duper treat is a blueberry. He would eat his weight in them if I let him.”

Many people are attracted to Yorkies

because of their cute look. But Cobb said potential owners should be aware that they are terriers that act like a “big dog in a small package.”

“If someone was looking to acquire a Yorkie, I would tell them to seek out a reputable breeder. They need to do their research on the breed. ... Yorkies require maintenance in grooming and dentals. Some bark a lot. Expect them to always want to be around you and in your face with a playful attitude.” **FD**

Penny Leigh is the director of the AKC Agility League and AKC GoodDog Helpline, and competes in dog sports with her canine team.

For more information on the AKC Agility League: akc.org/akc-agility-league/





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The Golden Retriever delights fans, as always.

DOGS by the Dozen

AKC Meet the Breeds returns to NYC.
By Theo Bernstein



In January, Manhattan's Javits Center transforms into a dog lover's paradise as thousands flock to AKC Meet the Breeds, where experienced breeders and fanciers showcase over 150 breeds for devoted fans and curious newcomers. This year, the American Kennel Club welcomed the biggest crowd in the event's history, as 35,000 canine enthusiasts filed into

the convention center on Saturday and Sunday.

With bustling crowds, a steady stream of entertainment in the central demonstration ring, and children burning off energy in the kids' zone, AKC Meet the Breeds grows livelier each year. The focus of the event is to introduce the public to as many dog breeds as possible, making Meet the Breeds a unique, can't-miss event.

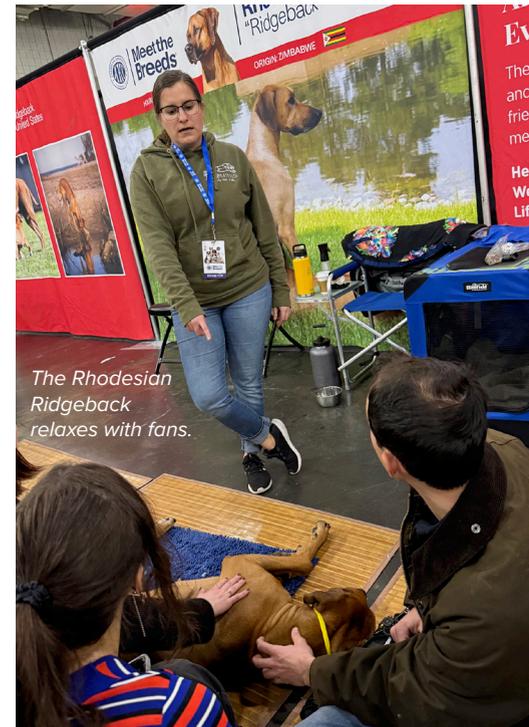
If you are lucky enough to spend time at an AKC all-breed dog show, you can cast your eyes on a wide variety of dogs. But to learn about them up close, Meet the Breeds is the top destination.

Learning While Petting

The beauty of Meet the Breeds is that you can discover all sorts of fun facts and quirky characteristics about



A Portuguese Podengo Pequeno leans in for a closer look.



The Rhodesian Ridgeback relaxes with fans.

Top and bottom left: John Ricard ©AKC; bottom right: Theo Bernstein



the breeds by interacting with dogs and their devoted owners. I was strolling the floor when the sight of the smooth, caramel-colored coat of the Basenji pulled me toward its table. As I asked its owner what makes the breed unique, the Basenji echoed a bark he heard coming

from down the aisle, emitting a sustained, high-pitched howl in return. The owner laughed, saying the dog “took the words out of my mouth!” She explained that due to the unusual shape of his larynx, Basenjis make a unique “yodeling” type of sound, rather than barking.

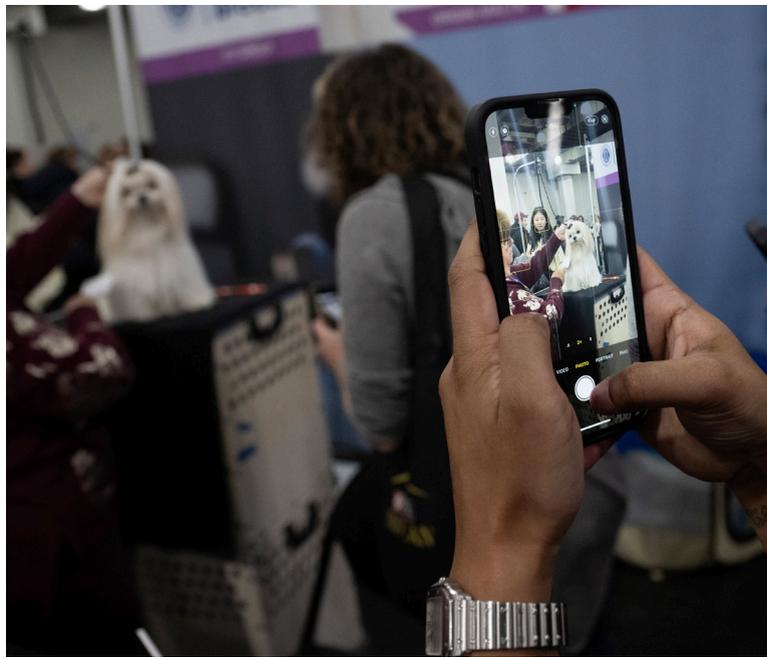


A miniature wirehaired Dachshund with owner wearing traditional German dress

Further on in the alphabet, I learned that despite its name, the Pharaoh Hound is from Malta, not Egypt—it gets its name from resembling ancient Egyptian descriptions of dogs. The Pharaoh’s claim to fame is that it can blush—its nose and ears turn a rosy color



Top left and bottom: John Ricard ©AKC; top right: Theo Bernstein



when it is excited. Although I wanted to witness that unique talent, the Pharaoh crew was calm and relaxed (as Meet the Breeds dogs tend to be), so I moved on through the aisles to discover more fun facts.

Many of the breeds offer a glimpse into past ways of life around the world. At the Canaan Dog booth, I learned this ancient breed was known to help shepherds in Biblical times. Later on at

the Xoloitzcuintli booth, I learned that the ancient Aztecs of Mexico believed this hairless dog had healing powers.

The Nederlandse Kooikerhondje helped hunters lure ducks during the Middle Ages, using special water traps before gunpowder was invented. (This small red and white dog with black tipped ears also earned the distinction of being the hardest breed to spell at the event.) Meanwhile, the ever-popular

Dachshund was presented by owners in a traditional dirndl dress, while owners of the Scottish Deerhound came dressed in tartans and Highlandwear.

Providing education about responsible pet ownership is a pillar of the AKC's mission, so it was common to hear glowing accounts alongside caveats from the breed ambassadors. At the Rhodesian Ridgeback booth, a fancier explained that these muscular, athletic

Top: John Ricard ©AKC; bottom: Theo Bemstein



Learning about coat care with the Welsh Terrier



AKC's Gina DiNardo and Pet Honesty's Rich Greenberg introduce AKC-licensed pet multivitamins.



Amber McCune and Border Collie Typo

hounds can be great for owners who like to run, but many can actually be couch potatoes. As I took in the impressive size of the Black Russian Terrier, I noticed an overflowing bowl of kibble with a sign that read, “I eat 7-plus cups of food a day.” As I did quick arithmetic in my head to compare the BRT’s diet to my Cardigan

Welsh Corgi’s daily meals, I confirmed this breed is not for everybody.

Let’s See Action

Breed booths kept visitors on the move throughout the day, but the demonstration ring in the center of the venue kept audiences entertained as well. The NYPD K-9 Unit offered a rare

glimpse into the work of some of the most talented and highly trained dogs in the country. Members of the Port Chester Obedience Training Club showcased their tricks, with the star team of Amber McCune and Border Collie Typo showing off their precision and speed in agility.

There was no shortage of action. Hudson-Housatonic Disc Dogs chased down Frisbees in a demonstration of disc dog, the American Chesapeake Club introduced the AKC Fetch program, and Nestle Purina Pet Care’s resident senior veterinarian Dr. RuthAnn Lobos stopped by to offer tips on how to help dogs live longer and healthier lives.

Since Meet the Breeds is a family affair, AKC set up its popular kids’ zone to give children space to unleash their own zoomies. A kid-sized agility course was busy all day long. AKC’s Public Education team offered sticker books for breed scavenger hunts, face painting, and balloons. Winning works from their annual kids’ Meet the Breeds art contest were also on display.

Finding Favorites

During the event, Purina Pro Plan’s “Battle of the Breeds” allowed visitors to vote for their favorite breed. The



A First-Timer Meets the Breeds

By Phil Dzikiy

As the new Managing Editor of this magazine, it would have been nice, in some way, to not only attend AKC Meet the Breeds, but to offer some sort of deep insight, or a heretofore-unseen angle on the AKC's annual dog extravaganza.

But the truth is, like most dog lovers attending the event—especially for the first time—I honestly just wanted to immerse myself in the experience. And more importantly, meet and pet as many dogs as I could.

A Pembroke Welsh Corgi was placed on my shoulder. A Brussels Griffon gave me a kiss. I rubbed a Bedlington Terrier's belly. A Borzoi snuggled up against my leg. (I'd always wanted to pet a Borzoi.)

Also, as a person who's currently "between dogs," it also may have been a bit of a scouting expedition. Meeting so many breeds makes it easy to picture one or two in your own home, joining your own family.

Now, we all have our favorites. I've always been into Greyhounds. Beagles. Boston Terriers. But most notably, for many years, I was lucky enough to own a wonderful Pug. I will always love Pugs. (What's not to love?) Once you fall in love with a breed, it can be hard to think outside of that box. There's nothing wrong with that at all.



But there's also nothing wrong with opening your mind—and heart—to other breeds. I went in with an open mind, thinking maybe some dogs would surprise me.

The thing is, of course, all the dogs I met were sweethearts. But I did feel some sort of connection with a few breeds I'd never been around before, like the Cesky Terrier, the Entlebucher Mountain Dog, and the Spinone Italiano. Perhaps most of all, I was struck by the Sussex Spaniel. The dog simply charmed me.

Does that mean a Sussex will be my next dog—whenever that happens? Not necessarily. But before Meet the Breeds, I doubt I would have even considered it. —PD

Siberian Husky ended up championing the rankings for the weekend, followed closely by other breeds, including the Finnish Lapphund and the Welsh Terrier.

I asked the team at the Siberian Husky booth what sets their breed apart, and one owner provided a helpful perspective: "They're quite intense and they're very smart. They need stimulation often to keep their brain occupied, so they always need a job." Also, a pro tip: among its fans, the breed's nickname is the Siberian, or even "Sibe," but never just "Husky."

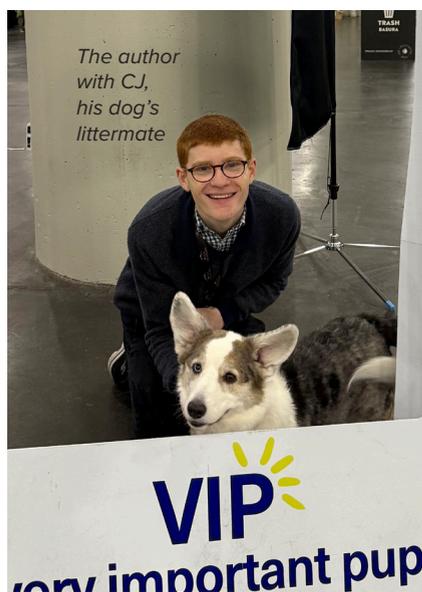
Welsh Terrier representatives were eager to share their breed's story with me as well. "The Welsh Terrier is the oldest English breed, and they are really best for an active lifestyle," one exhibitor said. "I think what makes them so popular is their signature look. Their tan and black coloring definitely makes for one of the most distinct coats in the Terrier group, and their folded ears give them an unforgettable face. They really are best for an active lifestyle, as they're always full of energy."

The young owner-handler was proud to say that her dog, Juni, loves to interact with all kinds of visitors each January: "This is our third year doing AKC Meet the Breeds, and we love coming out and meeting new people every time." For me and thousands of other people, the feeling was mutual. **FD**

Theo Bernstein is a Cardigan Welsh Corgi fancier and junior handler residing in New York City. Currently in 10th grade, he is a two-time winner of the DWAA Junior Writers Award.

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Top: John Ricard ©AKC; bottom: Theo Bernstein



Canine Ambassador
Randi Chylinski talks
to children.



The AKC Canine Ambassador Program

An AKC Public Education initiative

By Meghan Cutler and Jessica Vasallo

Courtesy Randi Chylinski

The Canine Ambassador program has been around almost as long as the AKC's Public Education department. Our earliest record of the program is a section in "The Public Education Corner," an AKC newsletter. The blurb references a notice sent to members in 1993, reminding them of the purpose of the Canine Ambassador directory.

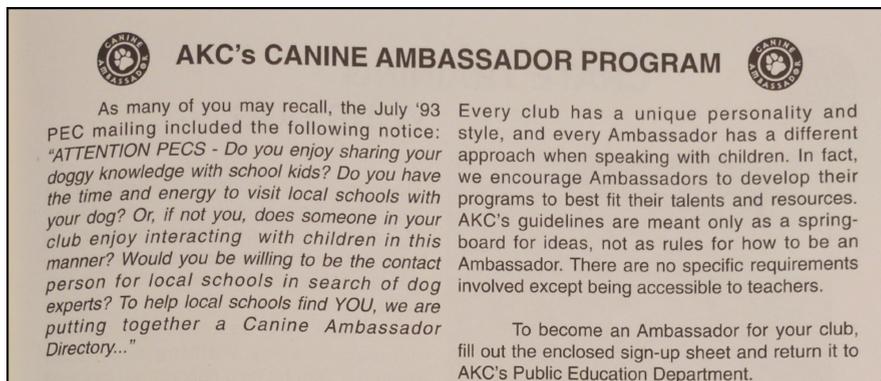
Since then, the Public Education department was dissolved and eventually brought back. It is now housed under the Education department with AKC Canine College and the AKC Library & Archives. Despite all the changes throughout the years, the Canine Ambassador program stands strong. In 2024, the program recorded a 64 percent growth in membership. Additionally, 73 percent of members recorded completing at least one education visit in their community.

You may be wondering what a Canine Ambassador does on these education visits. Initially, the program encouraged members to visit local schools with their dogs. However, due to the changes in protocol at schools and the challenges of finding a school that allows a dog on campus or visitors, we have extended the list of qualifying visits.

Though many of our Canine Ambassadors still successfully visit schools in their local area, there are many other ways these ambassadors can contribute to their community, including visits at nursing homes, community events, local libraries, and Meet the Breeds events. To qualify as an educational visit, Canine Ambassadors must present or speak to the public to educate them on the core themes of purebred dogs, dog sports, safety around dogs, or responsible dog ownership.

Member Benefits

The AKC Canine Ambassador program empowers members to educate children and the public on dog-related topics



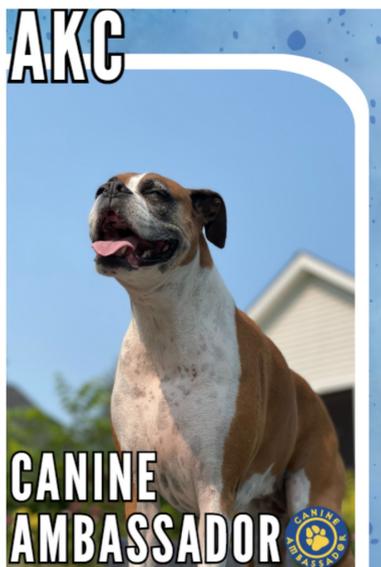
A write-up for the Canine Ambassador program in a 1997 AKC newsletter

alongside their canine companions. AKC Public Education provides comprehensive resources to help Canine Ambassadors deliver engaging presentations, including a resource folder containing slide decks on responsible dog ownership, safety around dogs, purebred dogs, dog sports, and events. These materials, enriched with videos, links, and age-appropriate activities, ensure presentations resonate with diverse audiences.

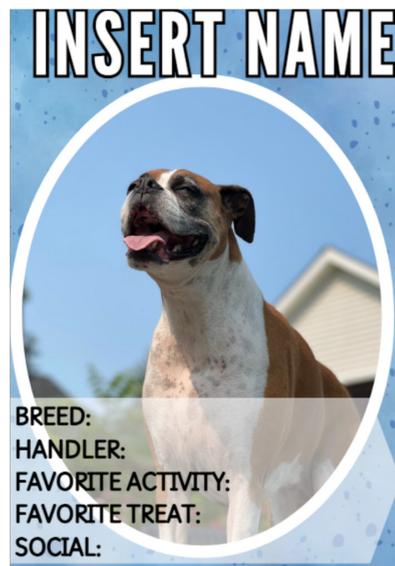
Every club has a unique personality and style, and every Ambassador has a different approach when speaking with children. In fact, we encourage Ambassadors to develop their programs to best fit their talents and resources. AKC's guidelines are meant only as a springboard for ideas, not as rules for how to be an Ambassador. There are no specific requirements involved except being accessible to teachers.

To become an Ambassador for your club, fill out the enclosed sign-up sheet and return it to AKC's Public Education Department.

The Public Education team continually updates the program with new activities aligned with its core themes, including seasonal options to keep presentations fresh. A quarterly newsletter offers additional support, featuring tips for successful visits, updates on new initiatives, and exclusive resources like customizable trading card templates featuring Canine Ambassadors' dogs—a popular and memorable touch for children and adults alike.



Front



Back

A Canine Ambassador trading card



An RVKC Canine Ambassador during a visit

The newsletter also celebrates the outstanding work of Canine Ambassadors nationwide, inspiring others with stories of their impact. Additionally, upon approval, members receive an official Canine Ambassador pin for themselves and their dogs, and a certificate they can present at their visits.

While the program's resources are invaluable, the true benefit of being a Canine Ambassador is the opportunity to make a lasting impact on local communities. By fostering connections and

showcasing their dogs' unique abilities, Canine Ambassadors inspire appreciation for canine companionship and leave a meaningful mark on their audiences.

The Canine Ambassador program is more than an educational initiative—it's a celebration of the human-canine bond and a powerful way to foster knowledge, connection, and appreciation for dogs within communities. By equipping Canine Ambassadors with top-notch resources and a supportive community, the program ensures that their outreach

How to Join the Program:

Joining the Canine Ambassador program is easy. Many individuals will find that they already contribute to their community in many ways that fit the program. To become a member, one must:

- Complete an application
- Provide proof of your dog's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) title
- Provide a letter of recommendation from a club officer or someone with extensive experience working with dogs
- Complete a short training and quiz to familiarize yourself with the regulations of the program
- Log at least one educational visit per calendar year

The Public Education team can help you through every step of the process. If you are interested in becoming a member and making an impact in your community, email publiced@akc.org for more information.

efforts create a lasting impact on audiences of all ages.

Canine Ambassadors in Action

Canine Ambassador visits can vary greatly. In one recent example, Maria Ruoto and Jo Claudia Austin attended their town's emergency preparedness expo. There, they discussed being prepared for emergencies with your dog, the importance of crate training, having first aid kits ready, microchipping your pets, and more. They also distributed handouts, including an emergency preparedness checklist—a valuable resource for pet owners.

Some clubs have groups of Canine

Canine Ambassador Retirement Spotlight

The program just celebrated the retirement of Patricia Belt and Lucille Perry, two dedicated individuals who've participated in the program for **10 or more years**.



Patricia Belt and her Dalmatians

Patricia Belt

Since 2013, Patricia Belt has been a dedicated member of the Canine Ambassador program, beginning her journey with her beloved Dalmatian, Lottie Dot. Some people are drawn to a particular breed; for Belt, it has always been Dalmatians. For the last 10 incredible years, Belt and her most recent canine companion, Izzy, shared the joy of teaching children about safety around dogs. Together, they demonstrated how to approach dogs safely, pet them properly, what it means to be a responsible dog owner, and much more.

Belt knows her efforts left a lasting impression, and countless children walked away from her presentations more confident and informed, ready to interact with dogs safely and kindly. Belt's Dalmatians were even more special because they were all deaf. Belt would wait until the end of her presentations to share this detail, knowing her "spotted helper" would be met with joyful cheers and claps rather than sympathetic sighs.

It is a beautiful lesson in resilience and how dogs can inspire us. Belt has touched countless lives through her dedication, leaving behind cherished memories and a legacy of compassion, education, and love for her favorite breed.

Lucille Perry

Lucille Perry, a dedicated Rogue Valley Kennel Club (RVKC) member, has been a key figure in dog sports and community outreach for over 25 years. Her journey in community service began in California, where she was involved in an obedience club and discovered the rewarding combination of her love for dogs and giving back to the community.

After moving to Oregon in 1990, Perry joined RVKC and became instrumental in forming a vibrant team of Canine Ambassadors. Together, they expanded their outreach efforts, visiting over 1,000 students annually to teach responsible pet ownership and the joys of living with dogs. Beyond schools, the RVKC Canine Ambassadors also spoke regularly at Rotary Club meetings and partnered with service organizations, broadening their impact within the community.

Before retiring from the program in 2024, Perry often partnered with her Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Lola. Known for her gentle and child-loving nature, Lola was the perfect companion for their educational visits. Perry found her most rewarding moments in helping children overcome their fear of dogs. Using a calm and thoughtful approach, she would invite hesitant children to approach Lola, positioning the dog with her back to them, encouraging gentle petting or brushing. This simple yet transformative method left a lasting impression on the children and Perry.

Reflecting on her time as a Canine Ambassador, Perry treasures the camaraderie she shared with her fellow Ambassadors. Together, they educated their community, built meaningful connections, and celebrated the unique bond between humans and dogs. Perry's dedication has left an enduring legacy, inspiring countless children and adults to embrace the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership.



Lucille Perry and her Staffordshire Bull Terrier

Ambassadors who conduct visits together. The Rogue Valley Kennel Club (RVKC) of Grants Pass, Oregon, is an excellent example, demonstrating outstanding community involvement through their club's group of Canine Ambassadors. These members and their dogs visit a local elementary school monthly, teaching students about dog

safety, obedience, canine health, and more with engaging live demonstrations. They've captivated groups as large as 200 children at once!

Beyond the classroom, RVKC Canine Ambassadors also bring joy to the local assisted living facility. With their dogs showcasing obedience and performing entertaining tricks, they create meaningful

connections with residents, spreading smiles and companionship. **FD**

Meghan Cutler and Jessica Vasallo are the AKC Public Education team.



Courtesy subjects

Ron Godshall in action
with his canine partner
Franco

Ron May You Run

*A veteran and
amputee stays
active in Agility
League with a
special canine
partner.*



Rosemary McGovern

Thirteen years ago, Ron Godshall and Heather Eckenrode entered agility class as newbies to the sport.

Godshall had a majestic Giant Schnauzer named Boopsie who was a star in the conformation ring. Eckenrode had two cute spaniel mixes, Bradshaw and Rooney, and limited experience with dog training.

The two started chatting, and Eckenrode had a lot of questions for Godshall about the dog world. A friendship began. They advanced through classes and into competition.

“When we started trialing, Ron would occasionally ask me to run one of his dogs if his leg was too tired to finish out the last runs of the day. His leg had poor circulation due to diabetes related to Agent Orange exposure when he was in Vietnam in the Marines,” Eckenrode says. “Since we were in class together, Boopsie, and later Ron’s other dogs, Nellie Belle and Maxie, became familiar with me and would run with me.”

The condition of Godshall’s leg declined, and in 2020, doctors recommended amputation. His leg was removed above the knee, and Godshall entered rehabilitation with the goal of returning to agility.

Sadly, his last Giant Schnauzer passed away before that could happen.

But Eckenrode made sure that Godshall’s wish came true. She offered her new puppy, a mixed breed named Franco, to be his agility partner.

MEETING FRANCO

Godshall got to know Franco while Eckenrode drove him to his numerous post-op medical appointments. (Godshall’s wife, Bonnie, has vision issues that prevent her from driving, and ride share options were limited during the pandemic.)

“While I was helping Ron get to his medical appointments, he became friends with Franco, who would hang



Heather Eckenrode and Ron, with Ron’s Giant Schnauzers

out with me in the car waiting for Ron at his leg fitting and other sessions,” Eckenrode says. “Franco started on his agility journey with me, and it was apparent that he finds great joy in running so we decided to start a new journey training him to run with Ron driving his electric scooter.”

They started training but realized there were limitations to Godshall’s scooter, which had a very wide turning radius. Eckenrode collaborated with others in the agility community to organize a fundraiser to purchase a sportier model of scooter.

“Franco is so fast sometimes I have a hard time seeing him. Now I can turn 360 on a dime and what a difference that made,” Godshall says. “In the last six months, I think Franco’s tuned into

me an awful lot. I think to remember he watches my front wheels, so I have to be pointing them where I want to go.”

Every Tuesday evening, Eckenrode drives Franco to meet Godshall for agility class at Keystone Agility Club in Barto, Pennsylvania.

“Because Ron lives about 50 minutes away from me, we don’t get a lot of time to practice together. The instructor, Jacky Mento, has been so wonderful, supporting us from when this was just a crazy idea until now when Ron and Franco can run full courses,” Eckenrode says. “I got Ron a shirt last summer for his birthday that says ‘Ordinary.’ We were hoping we would get good enough at class to be doing the same courses as everyone else and having the same challenges that everyone else has and we have.”



Franco is ready to follow Ron's lead on the agility course.

LADS IN LEAGUE

Not only are they completing courses in class, Godshall and Franco started competing in the AKC Agility League in the fall. They run on the novice-level team High Octane Moonshots based at High Octane Agility in Colmar, Pennsylvania.

“The best thing that we have done is join the League. We get to run and

be competitive and work on things we need to work on—plus all the help we get from our teammates is great,” Godshall says. “We still have a lot to work on, but I think it would be pretty exciting to get to the nationals.”

Agility dogs cue off their handler's feet and pay attention to how their handlers direct with their arms. It is

an ongoing process to figure out how Godshall can best direct Franco while driving his scooter.

“Our first season of Agility League was even more awesome than we had hoped. The team aspect of it is really fun. It took us a few weeks to get our first clear round, but since then we've had a clear run every week,” Eckenrode says. “It's so wonderful

Courtesy Heather Eckenrode



Team Franco gets ready for the course

Left to bottom: Rosemary McGavin; Courtesy: Heather Eckenrode

to have a regular opportunity to work on our skills with a little extra pressure closer to what a trial is like.

“Who knows where this will take us? Maybe after we build more skills, we’ll get to compete or do a demo at a big event. When I told Ron that there is a para agility championship in Europe, he said he’d get his passport!”

Godshall began working with dogs more than 60 years ago when he obtained a job at a kennel while in high school.

The kennel trained dogs for a local police force, and Godshall went on to breed German Shepherd Dogs and Doberman Pinschers before discovering the Giant Schnauzer. He and his wife bred many Giant Schnauzers, which won both in the breed ring and in sporting competitions.

VALUABLE BONDS

At 78, Godshall said he may not get another dog, so he values the time that he can share with Franco, thanks to Eckenrode.

“Heather has been my rock,” he says. “And I only see Franco two times a week, but we have a bond. Heather will say ‘Can you please call him out of his crate?’ and then he hops out and loads himself in the chair with me.”

Eckenrode and Godshall still take

a weekly agility class together, but, for now, she is letting Ron take the lead in handling him.

“Franco is a very talented and excitable guy. I knew by having him work with two people, we would not be able to be as consistent with training criteria and that would create some gaps and challenges, but that is OK,” she says. “This journey with Ron is more important and impactful than any title I could earn with Franco. What he is giving to Ron is bigger than that. And he is giving me a learning opportunity of a lifetime.” **FD**

Penny Leigh is the director of the AKC Agility League and AKC GoodDog Helpline and competes in dog sports with her canine team.

There's a rhythm to it.
There's a timing to it.
There's a trust to it. It's
truly a team game.

—Chris Knapp, of Centralia, Illinois, on competing with his dog Macho in disc dog, also known as UpDog. In the 2024 AKC Disc Dog Challenge, Knapp and Macho took first place in the Men's Far Out competition and second in Freestyle.

Knapp likens Freestyle competition to figure skating, where teams are judged on creativity, performance, and teamwork. Routines may contain difficult tosses, flashy stunts, and, if you're Macho, backflips. While some teams prefer a tightly choreographed routine, Knapp and Macho rehearse a few set progressions, then feel it out on the field.

“So with me and Macho, it's a little looser. I can kind of read his body language; he can read my body language. He can more or less tell what I'm going to do or ask,” Knapp says. “He's also super athletic, so I know if I screw up, as long as I get that Frisbee out there, he's going to chase it down.”



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